IN THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for reducing signaling load in a communication network having a plurality of switches, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving a notification of a ~~network event~~ link failure at a switch adjacent to a link associated with said ~~network event~~ link failure;

identifying a plurality of circuits affected by said ~~network event~~ link failure by said switch;

grouping affected circuits in accordance with one or more end-switches to which a plurality of signaling messages have to be sent by said switch; and

bundling said plurality of signaling messages by said switch.

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

forwarding said bundled signaling messages to one of said plurality of switches.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein said forwarding step forwards said bundled signaling messages in at least one signaling packet.

4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein said forwarding step forwards said bundled signaling messages for circuits with a common end switch.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said signaling messages are release messages.

6.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, <u>further comprising:</u> ~~wherein said identifying step and said grouping step are performed~~ <u>pre-identifying a plurality of circuits grouped by said one or more end-switches</u> prior to said reception of said ~~network event~~ <u>link failure</u> based upon possible failure scenarios, and where results of ~~performing said identifying step and said grouping step~~ <u>said pre-identifying</u> are stored for a plurality of possible failure scenarios.

7.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 4, wherein said forwarding step forwards said bundled signaling messages for circuits with a common end switch along a common path.

8.   (Currently Amended) An apparatus for reducing signaling load in a communication network having a plurality of switches, said apparatus comprising:

a controller at a switch adjacent to a link associated with a ~~network event~~ <u>link failure</u> for receiving a notification of said ~~network event~~ <u>link failure</u>, and for identifying a plurality of circuits affected by said ~~network event~~ <u>link failure</u>, and for grouping affected circuits in accordance with one or more end-switches to which a plurality of signaling messages have to be sent, and for bundling said plurality of signaling messages.

9.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 8, wherein said controller forwards said bundled signaling messages to one of said plurality of switches.

10.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein said bundled signaling messages are forwarded for circuits with a common end switch.

11.   (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium having stored thereon a plurality of instructions, the plurality of instructions including instructions which, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to perform the steps comprising of:

receiving a notification of a ~~network event~~ <u>link failure</u> at a switch adjacent to a link associated with said ~~network event~~ <u>link failure</u>;

identifying a plurality of circuits affected by said ~~network event~~ <u>link failure</u> by said switch;

grouping affected circuits in accordance with one or more end-switches to which a plurality of signaling messages have to be sent by said switch; and

bundling said plurality of signaling messages by said switch.

Claims 12. – 25. (Canceled).